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261224Z Oct 05

UNCLAS YEREVAN 001906

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN, EUR/ACE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: LATEST OPPOSITION PARTY RALLY -- SAME RHETORIC,
FEWER NUMBERS

1. (U) Aram Sargsyan's opposition Republic Party held a party meeting and rally October 25 in Yerevan's Matenadaran (Manuscript Museum) Square. The rally was peaceful and a modest police force of four officers was stationed at the sidelines of the meeting to assist with traffic flow and help pedestrians get to the meeting. At one point, Embassy observers counted approximately 1,000 supporters at the rally -- a much smaller group than attended similar opposition rallies last year. Sargsyan, along with other opposition leaders in attendance, called on citizens to boycott or vote "no" during the constitutional referendum scheduled for November 27. As they have in the past, they called for an organized public uprising to oust President Robert Kocharian from power.

2. (SBU) Aram Sargsyan opened the meeting by blasting the GOAM for denying his party the use of public indoor meeting facilities for the meeting. (Note: A previously scheduled series of conferences have occupied the GOAM's meeting facilities in downtown Yerevan for the past few days. We are unaware of the details of what, if any, space the GOAM offered the Sargsyan as an alternative to an outdoor meeting in Matenadaran Square. End Note.)

3. (SBU) Leaders of almost all Armenian opposition parties were present at the meeting. Speakers, including opposition Justice Bloc Stepan Demirchian, claimed that the GOAM would tamper with the upcoming referendum balloting, pointing to the 2003 Presidential elections as evidence that GOAM authorities were incapable of conducting free and fair elections. Comment: Even though most of the speakers acknowledged the importance of the proposed constitutional reforms, they made it clear that the November 27 vote is their preferred vehicle to rally support for their cause. The smaller-than-expected turnout, coupled with the absence of opposition figure Artashes Geghamian, suggests that the opposition is still struggling to form a common platform among the different parties and attract large numbers for public events like the October 25 meeting.
EVANS